



Joint News Release

For Immediate Release

Thursday, June 24, 2004

IRIS FRIENDSHIP GARDEN AT HIGHLAND PARK DEDICATED AT INTERNATIONAL CEREMONY

Monroe County Executive **Maggie Brooks** and Rochester Mayor **William A. Johnson, Jr.** welcomed honored guests from Japan, Australia, and various parts of the United States on Thursday, June 24, 2004 to celebrate the long-awaited dedication of the **Iris Friendship Garden at Highland Park**. The project evolved from the sister cities relationship between **Rochester** and **Hamamatsu, Japan**.

The Iris Friendship Garden will bloom in spring and summer. Visitors can view the irises each day during normal park hours.

"The Iris Friendship Garden is a wonderful addition to Highland Park," said County Executive Brooks. "Rochester is well-known as the 'Flower City' and this lovely garden certainly contributes to the legacy of our community and the Monroe County Parks System. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the generosity of so many from around the world who generously contributed more than 1,000 Louisiana Iris rhizomes to make this garden possible."

According to Mayor Johnson, the Iris Friendship Garden will be a perennial example of the vitality and ever-blossoming relationship that Rochester and Hamamatsu share. *"Rochester and Hamamatsu were paired as sister cities because of our mutual love of music and the arts," Mayor Johnson stated. "That love has now been extended to include our shared interest in beautiful parks and gardens."*

"It gives me great pleasure to be able to participate in today's dedication ceremony," Johnson continued. "I want to thank all of the people who made today possible. Your dedication and commitment to this project have not gone unnoticed. Because of your efforts, residents and visitors of both Rochester and Hamamatsu will be able to enjoy the beauty and significance of these native American wildflowers for many years to come."

The new garden showcases a varied collection of Louisiana Irises, a wildflower that is native to America. It will be in keeping with the historic landscaping created by Frederick Law Olmsted, who originally designed Highland Park in the late 1800s.

An official delegation of Japanese dignitaries were in attendance at the ceremony to help dedicate the unique garden. The group consisted of Hamamatsu City Deputy Mayor **Takehiko Miyamoto**; Hamamatsu International Affairs Director **Ryoichi Matsuo**; and **Yoichi Takimoto**, who is working with the Japan Local Government Center in New York City.

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The origins of the Iris Friendship Garden can be traced back to 1996, and coincides with the original signing of the Sister Cities agreement between Hamamatsu and Rochester. At that time, Mayor Johnson agreed that Rochester would participate in Pacific Flora, an international horticulture show scheduled to take place in Hamamatsu in May 2004.

Under the direction of Project Leader **Edna Claunch**, a member of the Hamamatsu/Rochester Sister Cities Committee, it was determined that the Louisiana Iris would be the featured flower at Pacific Flora. Ms. Claunch recruited internationally recognized hybridizers to create nine new cultivars of the native American iris, which would be unveiled for the first time at Pacific Flora, and would ultimately be showcased in the Iris Friendship Garden as well.

The nine new cultivars were developed in Louisiana and Australia by five hybridizers. Three of those hybridizers were in attendance at today's dedication ceremony and received recognition for their outstanding contributions to the success of the Iris Friendship Garden. They are:

* **Heather and Bernard Pryor** of Sydney Australia, who were responsible for the creation of five of the new cultivars: *Rochester Lilacs*, *Renee Fleming*, *Eastman Winds*, *Susan B. Anthony*, and *Lake Hamana*; and

* **Joseph F. Musacchia, Jr.** of New Orleans, Louisiana, who created the *Pure Water* cultivar, in celebration of Rochester's first pure water supply, the Highland Reservoir.

Additionally, two of the hybridizers could not attend the ceremony. They are:

* **Dorman Haymon** of New Orleans, Louisiana, who created two cultivars, *Frederick Douglass* and *Friends' Song*; and

* **Patrick O'Connor**, also of New Orleans, who created *Shizuoka Sunrise*, named in honor of the prefecture location of Hamamatsu and Pacific Flora.

Along with these nine new cultivars that were developed specifically for Pacific Flora, the Iris Friendship Garden will feature the five recognized original species of the Louisiana Iris. These five species are: Iris Hexagona, Iris Fulva, Iris Brevicaulis, Iris Giganticarulea, and Iris Nelsonii. All Louisiana Irises can be traced back to these five species.

Jane Chapman, president of the Rochester Garden Club, unveiled a new permanent plaque for the iris garden. The plaque was presented in honor of the 90th anniversary celebration of the Rochester Garden Club, which was founded in 1915. The group's first project, a 1916 Poet's Garden, is directly adjacent to the new Iris Friendship Garden.

Other dignitaries bringing well wishes included **Harry Wolford** of Palm Bay, Florida, who is Vice President of the Society for Louisiana Iris, and **Donna James** of Hannibal, New York, who is Vice President of Region 2 of the American Iris Society.

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Rochester native and noted soprano **Renee Fleming** was unable to attend the ceremony, but sent the following words of thanks to the assembled group: *"Having a flower named after me is an honor I never dreamed of receiving. Of all flowers, the Iris is one of my favorites, so I am especially thrilled to have this unique connection to such a beauty. The fact that the 'Renee Fleming' iris is being introduced in my childhood home of Rochester makes this tribute all the more special to me. I am so grateful to the talented Australian hybridizer, Heather Pryor, who created this iris. I look forward to visiting the new Iris Friendship Garden in Highland Park and seeing all the beautiful new irises."*

Similarly, the Australian Consul General in New York, **Ken Allen**, was unable to attend but sent the following remarks: *"I would like to extend my best wishes to all who have gathered today for this special occasion. I am constantly witness to great things being achieved by Australians in the United States. Congratulations to Bernard and Heather on their accomplishments. It is something that Australia and our American friends can be proud of. The Iris Friendship Garden will be a worthy and welcome addition to the beautiful city of Rochester."*

Also at today's dedication ceremony, acknowledgments were extended to major contributors to the garden, including: **Stuart MacKenzie**, a landscape architect known for his work with Frederick Law Olmsted restorations; **Michael Osadciw**, a graphic designer at the University of Rochester for the Iris Friendship Garden logo design; **Frank Allkofer**, director of Monroe County Parks; **Thomas Pollack**, superintendent of Horticulture for Monroe County Parks; **Loretta Scott**, city commissioner of Parks, Recreation, and Human Services.

Special thanks were also expressed to the Iris Friendship Garden Foundation officers: **Edna Claunch**, president; **Thomas Pollack**, vice president; **Elizabeth Hickman**, secretary; **Ralph Parks**, treasurer; and Counsel **Paul M. Whitbeck**.

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